

## The Assuring Whisper of God

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 06/26/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Kings 19:9b-18 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 10-11 Elijah complains to God saying, “‘...and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.’ And [the LORD] said, ‘Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by...”.

### Introduction

- ✘ Pastor Smith woke Sunday morning, bright and early as usual. He showered, dressed, ate and drove to church where he proceeded to prepare for another busy Sunday morning of worship, Bible Study and ministry.
  - ➔ As always, his excitement was high when Sunday came – hoping and praying that God would bring all of His people, as well as many visitors, to hear the Lord, to worship Him and to grow in His gifts.
- ✘ Yet, as the hour for worship drew near, he became concerned: no one else had come. Not even the ushers or the organist!
  - ➔ It was normal for people to arrive at the last minute, but this was different! The worship time came and Pastor Smith sat all alone on the chancel steps.
  - ➔ As it is in every church, there had been some who were speaking negative and hurtful words around the coffee pot and in the parking lot.
- ➔ Remembering this, the pastor’s depression began to grow as he sat all alone in the church. He concluded he was a complete failure. Negative thoughts about the elders and officers began to creep in. He imagined that the whole congregation had conspired together and now they were likely meeting out at the lake or at the restaurant for brunch.
- ➔ He couldn’t help but ask himself, “Why did God call me to a congregation that cares so little for the Lord?”
- ✘ Then the door opened. It was the organist walking in with her normal cheerful grin. Pastor Smith glared. But before he could speak, the organist caught a glimpse of the clock and said, “Oh, look, nobody turned back the clock yet. We wouldn’t want people to be an hour off, would we Pastor?”
  - ➔ With his face flushed in embarrassment and shame Pastor Smith rushed to change the clock and said, “Ummm, no we certainly wouldn’t want that.”

### I. I’m all alone

- ✘ To be honest, the pastor isn’t the only one in the church who might be tempted at times to feel all is lost and nobody else cares.
  - ➔ When you are the only one that shows up to a meeting, or the only one supporting a good idea – for evangelism, for the Christian day-school, to re-vitalize the congregation, etc. it can seem lonely.
- ✘ And the feelings at home can be the same. Maybe no one else is willing to commit to a time for family devotions or to stop the hurtful and vulgar words or to forgive or to be active in worship and Christ’s work.
  - ➔ So, just as it was for Pastor Smith, Satan and the world can draw any one of us into a spiritual depression by directing our focus only to the worldly indicators of what makes a church or a home and a family successful.

- We can look at the budget, the lack of offerings and income, the attendance figures and say, “it’s all going down the tubes.” “What’s the use of trying anymore?”
- Or at home, we can look at the budget, the lack of income, the disrepair of the car and the house, the rising gas, grocery and mortgage payments, the never-ending laundry and the unwillingness of anyone to do it and we can say, “Why even try anymore.” “I’m better off if I just leave, or never get out of bed, or drink until I can forget my loneliness.”
- ✘ In today’s Scripture Reading we see that even the great prophets of God dealt with these struggles.
  - It was only a month or so earlier that Elijah was on top and riding high. At the top of Mt. Carmel he challenged the prophets of the idol Baal to a test to prove that Yahweh is the only true God and that Baal was a worthless concoction of their own imaginations.
  - And God proved Himself to be LORD of Lord’s in a spectacular display of fire from heaven. Then, following God’s direction, Elijah chased down and killed all of those prophets of Baal.
  - As you can imagine, this angered Queen Jezebel greatly. She had already killed all of the LORD’s prophets that she could find and now she vowed to kill Elijah as well.
  - When Elijah heard of her threat, he panicked. He fled into the desert. There, in his despair he said, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life...” (1 Kgs 19:4).
  - But God would have none of it. He kept Elijah alive, feeding him with angels as Elijah continued to flee – approx. 300 miles on foot, all the way to Mt. Sinai.
- ✘ Now as our text begins we find him hiding in a cave. He’s had 40 days of travel to consider his situation. As far as he knows, the people of Israel have deserted him. He’s mentally, physically, and spiritually exhausted. And to his way of thinking, all is lost! His life, his ministry and God’s church are all going down the tubes!

## II. God’s Response

### A. I work in MY way, not yours

- ✘ Elijah believed that he was running from the enemy; the unfaithful; the “quitters” who had no clue what it meant to be in God’s church. But God reveals a very different reality. He shows Elijah that he is the one who separated and turned away from God. By his actions Elijah was pulling farther and farther away from the LORD to the point that he was in danger of losing his own faith.
  - People do that still today whenever something happens that they don’t like. Instead of coming closer to God for help or a better understanding, they begin to stay away, often a little bit at a time until eventually they end up leaving the LORD all together.
- ✘ But the LORD wasn’t about to have that happen with Elijah. So, as He always does, He took the initiative and in mercy, He came to Elijah with a three-fold response.
- ✘ The first part of His response is to show Elijah that He, God, works in His own way – not according to the world’s expectations or Elijah’s ways as a sinful human being.
  - It’s as if Elijah totally forgot how the LORD had been keeping him alive and feeding him the whole time he was running away.
  - On top of that, God constantly listened to Elijah’s complaints and concerns – giving him ample opportunity to voice what was on his mind. God always wants to hear the voice of His children whenever we come to Him in prayer – even if we’re coming in anger, hatred or despair.

Here at the cave the LORD asks, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (vv.9,13) And He listens both times to Elijah's complaint, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (vv.10,14).

- ✘ It appears Elijah is expecting another dramatic, miraculous display from God. But in doing so, he limits our limitless God so that Elijah is already missing and looking right past the ordinary every day and obvious ways that God works in his life; those ways that are right in front of his face.

→ This complete blindness to the obvious and quiet working of God reminds me of a game that we used to play with our cousins when I was a kid.

Whenever we went to my grandma and grandpa's house, we loved to play "hide the thimble" in grandma's kitchen. One kid would hide the thimble in the kitchen while the rest of us were out in the hallway. Then we would all go in and search. The first person to find the thimble would win.

Now, after playing that game for years we thought we knew all of the hiding spots. But every once and a while, one of the older kids would trick the rest of us by putting the thimble right under our noses. Whenever they did, we couldn't find the silly thing!

Before long, we'd start to complain, "You cheated in some way." But then they showed us the thimble, right out in the open and we'd all turn away in embarrassment. You see, we became so conditioned to looking for the thimble in the tricky spots that we no longer saw it out in the open, in an ordinary place.

## **B. God is with us.**

- ✘ Well, God taught Elijah this same lesson when God came to him not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the gentle whisper of His voice. Likewise you and I, dear friends, must be careful that we don't look past or take for granted God's gentle whispers of grace; those places where He is present with us – but that might seem ordinary and unspectacular to our world.

→ So, look! Look, see and hear God when He whispers; as He is born in a manger, hanging and suffering quietly on a cross, and victorious over sin and death in the silent and empty tomb!

- Look today and find Him forever with you to guide, comfort, strengthen and save you in the silent whisper of His perfect Word; in the gentle touch of His true body and blood upon your lips in Holy Communion; in the cleansing wisp of water and Word by which you were baptized and saved in His name forevermore.

- These are the places God has promised to always be at work in your lives and mine. They may seem ordinary, but these whispers from God; these means of His grace are all that we need to receive His gift of salvation.

- ✘ Some might ask, "Is God really with us here at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church?" Well, if we're searching among the worldly indicators, like the financial report or worship and Sunday School and volunteer numbers we might be tempted to find a reason for despair.

→ But if you pay close attention to everything going on; to the gentle whispers of God here at Mt. Calvary, you and I will see a much different picture.

→ Look and see for example how:

...the Lord has worked through the people and activities; the adult classes and more to bring family members who previously wanted nothing or very little to do with Jesus to now in recent years plug in as excited and active members of Christ and His body at Mt. Calvary.

...or how we have been able to help out the teachers and students at Butler Elementary as caring, reading and lunchroom buddies.

...or how we are going to offer a completely free opportunity for anyone in our community to come to the park in about a week and a half and watch a high quality and entertaining movie that will also share the message of our confidence in Christ as the way to forgiveness and eternal salvation.

...or how every Sunday our Sunday School Teachers are ready to serve God in nurturing the faith of our children (without recognition); or the way that a printed copy of our weekly sermon and bulletin ends up in one of our federal prisons to be read and shared with others.

→ And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Those are only some of the ways that God is whispering His grace in and through you and me here at Mt. Calvary.

- ⊗ It's all His work! So Christians, all is not lost! In our Epistle Reading today, Paul calls the Christians in Galatia to task because they have taken their eyes off of Jesus and focused instead on "works of the flesh"; on the worldly things instead of seeing and hearing God's whisper among them; among us all who "belong to Christ Jesus" (Gal. 5:24). So as Paul says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25).

### **C. There are others with us in Christ**

- ⊗ Just as God assured Elijah that He had kept 7000 faithful people to support and labor with him in the church, so you and I – and our family of believers here at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church – are so much bigger than just our membership and our work here in this area.

→ God's whisper of grace extends around the world as He uses us and our support of brothers and sisters in the LCMS to extend His Gospel graces everywhere.

→ As just one example, this entire next year we will be sharing opportunities to join with our fellow congregations in the Rocky Mountain District in supporting our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world in Siberia, so that they can continue to worship our God and be His agents for spreading the saving message of Jesus in Russia, where it once was only heard underground.

- ⊗ None of us is alone as God works here in His Church. Think of it this way: is it a spectacular thing when God moves us to place our offering in the plate? Not in a worldly sense – it happens every week. Yet as the examples we just listed show, it is in a very real way, a part of God's "whisper" of gracious work among the people He has gathered here, to join with each other under God in bringing more people to salvation!

### **Conclusion**

- ⊗ So, my fellow believers; you and I need never feel alone; we need never find ourselves in despair; we need never be afraid. For our God is always with us in Word, Sacrament and in Spirit.

→ In Jesus Christ may you and I always hear the assuring whisper of God for our comfort and our salvation! Amen.